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FOR ARA/PAN-MINISTER BELL

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SUBJECT: CONGRESSIONAL Q&A'S ON PANAMA: VIII EXILES

THIS IS THE EIGHTH AND FINAL MESSAGE IN A SERIES OF POSSIBLE
QUESTIONS AND
PROPOSED RESPONSES FOR CONGRESSIONAL TESTIMONY ON PANAMA.
THIS MESSAGE PROVIDES RESPONSES BASED ON CURRENT INFORMATION
RELATING TO THE JANUARY 20 ARREST AND EXILE OF A NUMBER OF
PROMINENT PANAMANIAN OPPONENTS OF THE TORRIJOS GOVERNMENT.

1. Q. THE PERSONS EXILED HAVE BEEN CALLED "BUSINESSMEN."
EXACTLY WHO WERE THEY? WHAT WERE THEIR BACKGROUNDS?

A. A TOTAL OF 11 PERSONS, ALL MEN, WERE ARRESTED BY
THE GOVERNMENT ON JANUARY 20 AND DEPORTED BY GOVERNMENT
AIRCRAFT TO GUAYAQUIL, ECUADOR SHORTLY THEREAFTER. FOUR
OF THESE MEN WERE BUSINESSMEN OR OFFICIALS OF BANKS IN
PANAMA CITY. FOUR OTHERS WERE LEADING CATTLEMEN OR RICE
GROWERS FROM CHIRIQUI PROVINCE IN THE WESTERN PART OF
PANAMA. TWO WERE LAWYERS, AND SOMETIME JOURNALISTS.

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ONE WAS THE OWNER AND MANAGER OF A RADIO STATION, ON

WHICH HE WAS A PRINCIPAL COMMENTATOR AS WELL. TWO OTHERS, BOTH BUSINESSMEN, WERE SOUGHT BY THE POLICE BUT EVADED ARREST. THEY WERE GRANTED ASYLUM IN THE VENEZUELAN EMBASSY, AND AFTER RECEIVING A SAFE-CONDUCT OUT OF THE COUNTRY FROM THE GOVERNMENT OF PANAMA, THEY JOINED THE OTHER EXILES IN ECUADOR BY WAY OF CARACAS. IN ADDITION, WE UNDERSTAND THAT ONE PROMINENT RADICAL LEFTIST UNIVERSITY PROFESSOR, WHO WAS ALSO REPORTEDLY SOUGHT FOR ARREST, HAS EVADED THE POLICE AND MAY HAVE FLED PANAMA.

2. Q. WERE THERE OTHERS ARRESTED AT THE SAME TIME? HOW MANY?

A. THE EMBASSY IS AWARE THAT AT LEAST THREE OTHERS WERE ARRESTED IN PANAMA CITY, ALL OF WHOM WERE ASSOCIATED WITH THE RADIO STATION WHOSE OWNER WAS EXILED. THESE MEN WERE RELEASED SHORTLY THEREAFTER. THE GOVERNMENT OF CHIRIQUI PROVINCE STATED THAT FIVE PERSONS ARRESTED IN CHIRIQUI WERE RELEASED AFTER A FEW DAYS IN CUSTODY. THE EMBASSY HEARD REPORTS THAT OTHER PERSONS WERE DETAINED BRIEFLY BY THE POLICE AT VARIOUS TIMES DURING THE PROTEST BUT WERE RELEASED WITHIN A FEW HOURS. THE GOVERNMENT OF PANAMA HAS STATED THAT NO PERSONS ARE CURRENTLY UNDER ARREST IN PANAMA FOR POLITICAL OFFENSES, OR FOR OTHER ACTIONS RELATED TO THE PROTEST. THE EMBASSY HAS HEARD NOTHING TO CONTRADICT THIS ASSERTION.

3. Q. THE PEOPLE EXILED HAVE BEEN CALLED "RIGHTISTS" AND "OPPONENTS OF THE GOVERNMENT." WERE THEY?

A. ALL OF THEM WERE WELL-KNOWN AS PUBLIC OPPONENTS OF THE TORRIJOS GOVERNMENT. BEARING IN MIND THAT "RIGHT" AND "LEFT" ARE IMPRECISE TERMS, SOME, BUT NOT ALL, COULD BE CALLED RIGHTIST. AT LEAST SOME OF THE FOUR BUSINESSMEN AND BANKERS WERE WIDELY KNOWN AS HAVING OUTSPOKENLY OPPOSED THE TORRIJOS GOVERNMENT AT MEETINGS OPEN TO THE PUBLIC, AND AS HAVING CALLED FOR FUNDAMENTAL CHANGES IN ITS STRUCTURE AND POLICIES. THE FOUR CATTLEMEN AND RICE GROWERS HAD PUBLICLY AND ON THE RADIO OBJECTED TO VARIOUS ECONOMIC POLICIES OF THE GOVERNMENT, AND TO OTHER ASPECTS LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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OF THE SYSTEM. THE TWO LAWYERS WERE SOCIALISTS--MEMBERS OF THE EX-SOCIALIST PARTY--AND WERE CLOSELY ASSOCIATED WITH A PRIVATELY-CIRCULATED NEWSLETTER WHICH HAS BEEN APPEARING REGULARLY AND OPENLY IN PANAMA FOR SEVERAL MONTHS. THIS NEWSLETTER HAS BEEN EXTREMELY CRITICAL OF THE GOVERNMENT AND HAS ALSO CALLED FOR FUNDAMENTAL CHANGES IN IT (THE GOVERNMENT SOUGHT AT ONE TIME TO DISCOURAGE ITS PUBLICATION, BUT WITHOUT SUCCESS). THE OWNER OF THE RADIO

STATION ALSO IDENTIFIED HIMSELF ON HIS STATION IN THE PAST AS A SOCIALIST. BEFORE HIS ARREST, AND THE CLOSURE OF THE STATION, IT WAS WIDELY KNOWN AS THE PRINCIPAL MOUTHPIECE FOR DISSENT AND OPPOSITION TO THE GOVERNMENT IN PANAMA. THE STATION TOOK NO PARTICULAR IDEOLOGICAL LINE -- AT VARIOUS TIMES, IT WAS USED BY BOTH ULTRA-LEFT AND ULTRA-RIGHT TO OBJECT TO AND CALL FOR MAJOR CHANGES IN THE GOVERNMENT. THE UNIVERSITY PROFESSOR WHO HAS APPARENTLY FLED THE COUNTRY TO AVOID ARREST IS A RADICAL LEFTIST WHO ATTACKS THE GOVERNMENT FOR HAVING "SOLD OUT" TO THE US AND THE PANAMANIAN COMMUNIST PARTY FOR BEING BOURGEOIS.

4. Q. WHAT IS THE LIKELIHOOD THAT THE EXILES WILL BE ALLOWED TO RETURN TO PANAMA?

A. WE THINK THAT THEY WILL BE ALLOWED TO RETURN. THE PANAMANIAN GOVERNMENT HAS REAFFIRMED THAT IT IS ITS POLICY TO REINTEGRATE SUCH PERSONS INTO PANAMANIAN SOCIETY PROVIDING THAT DOMESTIC POLITICAL TRANQUILITY AND THEIR CONDUCT WHILE ABROAD MAKE THIS POSSIBLE FOR THE GOVERNMENT. HOWEVER, THE GOVERNMENT HAS MADE NO PUBLIC ANNOUNCEMENT OF WHEN THIS WILL BE DONE, AND WE HAVE NO IDEA OF WHEN IT WILL DECIDE TO DO SO.

5. FOR USE ONLY REPEAT ONLY IF SPECIFICALLY AND CIRCUMSTANTIALY RAISED BY CONGRESS:

Q. WE UNDERSTAND THAT SOME OF THOSE INVOLVED IN THIS AFFAIR WERE AMERICAN CITIZENS. IS THIS TRUE? IS THE GOVERNMENT OF PANAMA MOVING AGAINST OUR CITIZENS AS AGAINST ITS OWN?

A. TO OUR KNOWLEDGE ALL OF THOSE INVOLVED, THOSE LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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EXILED AND THOSE ARRESTED AND RELEASED, WERE PANAMANIAN CITIZENS EXCEPT ONE MAN BRIEFLY DETAINED, WHO WAS A BRITISH SUBJECT, ALSO A CITIZEN OF ARGENTINA, AND A PERMANENT ALIEN RESIDENT IN PANAMA. TWO OF THE PANAMANIAN CITIZENS, HOWEVER, THE TWO WHO SOUGHT ASYLUM IN THE VENEZUELAN EMBASSY TO AVOID POSSIBLE ARREST, ALSO HAVE AMERICAN CITIZENSHIP. THEY WERE PERMANENTLY RESIDENT, AND IN PRIVATE BUSINESS, IN PANAMA. ALTHOUGH THEY UNDERSTOOD THAT THE POLICE WERE SEEKING THEM, THEY WERE NOT ACTUALLY ARRESTED -- THEY LEFT PANAMA UNDER SAFE-CONDUCT AFTER SEEKING ASYLUM, AND TRAVELLED FROM CARACAS TO JOIN THE OTHER EXILES IN ECUADOR OF THEIR OWN VOLITION-- AND AT THEIR OWN EXPENSE. WE KNOW OF NO PERSON WHO WAS AN AMERICAN CITIZEN WITHOUT OTHER CITIZENSHIP WHO WAS IN ANY WAY INVOLVED IN THIS AFFAIR.

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